



A report on the
by the Scrutiny and Audit Committee
on the
Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Scrutiny and Audit Committee
Investigations

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SUMMARY

This report sets out the process, conclusions and recommendations of the 19th investigation undertaken by Aberdeenshire Council's Scrutiny and Audit Committee. The subject of the investigation was the Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Scrutiny and Audit Committee investigations.

The committee had been considering, over the past 18 months, how some measure of effectiveness could best be allocated to its monitoring of the implementation of previous investigations, and following a debate at Council in early 2009, it was agreed that a mini-investigation take place.

The evidence gathering for the investigation took place in May, 2009 when the committee heard evidence from the Chief Internal Auditor and the Corporate Improvement Manager, Aberdeenshire Council, and from Dr. Andrew Coulson, Senior Lecturer in Local Government, INLOGOV, the University of Birmingham. Dr. Coulson's role in supporting the committee merged that of external expert and witness giving evidence. These witnesses were heard over three sessions, on 7 and 13 May, 2009. The committee also used the evidence collated to inform its own exploration of the issue in two additional sessions, which also considered information from the Centre for Public Scrutiny on assessing the effectiveness of scrutiny recommendations and discussion papers for IDeA into Performance Management and Measurement.

The committee considered all the evidence gathered and drew up its conclusions and recommendations at meetings on 21 May, 19 August, 7 October, 5 and 11 November, 2009 and 12 March, 2010.

At the August session, input arising from discussions with Senior Management Team at an away day on 17 June, 2009 was considered. Members of the management team made the request that the Scrutiny and Audit Committee reconsider its current review and monitoring processes to reduce duplication in reporting. This was felt to put undue pressure on staff time and resources and did not add value to either the work of the committee, or the council as a whole. The suggestion that the current operating procedures were not resource effective, and meant that officers would often have to report to two different committees, appeared to provided a counter-point to a position previously voiced that the Scrutiny and Audit Committee should develop mechanisms for being assured, and able to demonstrate in some evidence-based way, that the agreed recommendations were being taken forward, and successfully applied, to make a difference. The direct reporting to the Scrutiny and Audit Committee had previously seemed to be the best way to support this assurance.

In November, 2009, the committee gave further consideration to the aspects of the ownership of the recommendations approved by council. This was in the context of having received, at formal committee, a report by the Chief Internal Auditor on an area arising from a previous Scrutiny and Audit Committee investigation. This highlighted that, despite having being assured that a new policy had been created

and implemented, the internal audit work had uncovered that there were some areas of non-conformity and confusion.

Without having direct ownership of the application of the council-agreed recommendations, and with an operational awareness less than that of parent policy committees, which benefit both from professional officers and the experience of members working in a specific area over time, the Scrutiny and Audit Committee has no option but to accept the responses submitted by officers as part of its twice yearly review of previous investigations. The only alternative to accepting what is reported by officers would be re-investigation. However, any revised assessment would not necessarily mirror that of the original investigation, always acknowledged to be a snapshot in time.

In order to benefit from professional consideration, any recommendations arising from a Scrutiny and Audit Committee investigation are channelled, through management team, to full council. It is council which approves an action plan, passed to the appropriate parent committee to enact. The recommendations, as they form part of the original investigation report, tend to be suggestions of potential direction of travel and do not specifically assess operational changes – the committee acknowledges that to do more would be generally inappropriate.

Most of the recommendations made in the 18 investigations to date are not operationally specific. They are more indicative of required direction of change, relying on the operational experience of others to translate into SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timed) objectives. The Scrutiny and Audit Committee does not have either the operational experience, or control of resources, to make things happen or set the SMART objectives, but must rely on others to apply and progress the recommendations.

In other cases, the recommended improvement is for the establishment of a new policy, or other cultural change to the organisation, which may take time to fully bed down. Each investigation is a snapshot in time, and what may have seemed appropriate at the time of the investigation can not be slavishly applied without being related to current needs and experiences. In a similar way, some of the originally approved investigations become redundant in response to changes in circumstances which could not have been foreseen at the time of the original investigation. The situation is further complicated by the fact the investigations do not take place in a vacuum. Several different threads may come together to move the issue forward, not all directly arising from the work of the Scrutiny and Audit Committee.

Having looked at the outcomes reported of implementation of the 18 investigations to date, the committee feel that in each case a demonstrable change has happened as a result of its work. It is not always possible to claim entire credit for the change, or to assess it statistically. If credit were to be laid entirely with the committee, is it then also to be held responsible for areas where the feedback or performance has not improved, despite the application of the suggested improvements?

It was considered that the work being undertaken to move Aberdeenshire's performance reporting culture, to one where performance is more closely managed within each section, will provide greater statistical information. This will generate a

known baseline for more of the council's various activities and make more obvious linkages with strategic priorities and the Single Outcome Agreement, (SOA). In addition to allowing the construction and standard reporting of meaningful performance indicators, (PIs,) at all levels of operation, this would allow the application of any Scrutiny and Audit Committee sourced recommendation to be more easily demonstrated. The committee itself may have a role to ensure its recommendations' objectives link to the strategic priorities and Single Outcome Agreement themes by voicing proposals for improvement in such a way to make the connection obvious.

The committee feel that there is no merit in seeking to measure each outcome from its investigations, as neither ownership nor ability to alter outcomes lie with it. It is also felt that there must be a clear degree of separation between its spheres of influence and the work of the policy committees. There is, however, merit in reconsidering how Scrutiny and Audit Committee should be updated on progress on previous investigations. There is a continuing need for an alert mechanism in cases where there are barriers to implementation which do not appear to be being dealt with appropriately by the parent policy committee.

The committee had initially considered that measurement should be undertaken – and would be both valid and easy. However, in looking to other authorities, primarily those in England where a more developed and mandatory culture of scrutiny reviews exists, it became clear that there was no acceptable good practice standard which could be used as a guide.

The evidence provided by the Chief Internal Auditor was of great assistance to the committee. Mr. Hughes spoke of attending a conference of his peers, tasked to agree a mutual standard for assessing the operation of internal audit across all Scottish local authorities. He explained that for every potential definition suggested, a counter argument could be made – no single measure could be agreed, as all possible applications could be subject to manipulation.

The committee is clear that there is no single valid measurement of effectiveness which can be used to determine the undoubted impact the work of the committee has had on Aberdeenshire Council's operation. It is felt that the most accurate assessment of the work of the committee may be in its impact on other members of the council. On that basis, it is proposed that more attention be dedicated to having the committee's work formally considered by council. This could be achieved by the adoption of a system of annual reporting to council of what had been done, updates on previous investigations, and scoping the proposed future work plan.

The committee would therefore recommend the undernoted be considered:-

- The committee will be more aware, in voicing its recommendations, of aspects relating to activities supporting the delivery of the Single Outcome Agreement and strategic priorities, which can be more easily voiced and measured to track future progress.
- The committee will, in its choice of future topics and assessment of potential areas of improvement, seek to become more aware of available baseline information which may help express outcomes in a more measurable way.
- Update reports to the parent policy committees on matters arising from a Scrutiny and Audit Committee investigation should be automatically copied to the Scrutiny and Audit Committee as a bulletin report for its information. If there are barriers to the implementation of any of the recommendations, within the agreed timescale, these should be referred back to the Scrutiny and Audit Committee as well as to the parent policy committee.
- A discussion should be held on the possible value of the potential for, or added value of, occasional meetings between the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of each policy committee and the Scrutiny and Audit Committee as a forum for closer working and mutual awareness of the role of each.
- Revisions be made to the standard six monthly reporting format for previous investigations, including the application of a summary table of the overall status of all investigations, and methods of charting compliance explored to make the document of greater use.
- The Scrutiny and Audit Committee should produce an annual report for formal submission to and consideration by Aberdeenshire Council.
- Greater use should be made of the corporate communication facilities to raise awareness, both internally and externally, of the committee and its work.
- The Community Planning Board be alerted to the mandatory scrutiny arrangements in England for their future consideration in areas of joint working which seek to progress the agreed Single Outcome Agreement.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Scrutiny and Audit Committee

Within Aberdeenshire Council's Scheme of Delegation, the Scrutiny and Audit Committee is empowered to:

- Review the effectiveness of council policy implementation and council service delivery and to identify potential improvements;
- Undertake an annual programme of reviews; and,
- Make recommendations regarding improvements to the performance of services.

In carrying out its reviews, the Scrutiny and Audit Committee is able to:

- Call upon any officer of the Council or Chair/Vice-Chair of the Council's committees to give evidence or provide written reports, as appropriate; and,
- Call upon expert witnesses or members of the public to give evidence, where necessary.

The committee operates according to the following principles of working:

Deliberative	Outward-looking
Investigative	Inclusive
Open	Influencing
Evidence based	Proactive
Transparent	Flexible
Accountable	Non-partisan
Responsive	

1.2 This investigation

The Scrutiny and Audit Committee, on 11 February, 2009, agreed that two distinct pieces of work would be added to the committee's work schedule for 2009. The additional pieces of work arose from debate at Council on 22 January, 2009. These were (a) the review of Investigation No. 10, Decentralisation of Decision-Making in Aberdeenshire Council and (b) the consideration of the effectiveness of actions taken as a result of all previous Scrutiny and Audit Committee investigations. In April, 2009 it was agreed that the work to assess effectiveness of previous investigations, to inform future "measuring" of investigation outcomes be undertaken first, as its outcomes may inform the review of the Decentralisation of Decision-Making, (Investigation 10.)

Due to existing work commitments, the work did not begin until May, 2009, when a mini-investigation was undertaken into the current practice and thinking on how monitoring and evaluation could be applied to the implementation of the recommendations of previous investigations. This discussion continued after the summer recess when two additional areas of information were considered. These arose from an away day with management team in June, 2009 and a report by the Chief Internal Auditor to the formal Committee in November, 2009 which identified

that there may be discrepancies between a policy which was reported to the committee as complete, in place and being applied, and the reality in practical implementation, which was less clear.

It was agreed that the purpose and objectives of the investigation should be:

- to consider the recommendation from Audit Scotland that the investigative work of the committee should be subject to evaluation;
- to consider good practice in evaluation from elsewhere;
- to determine where ownership of actions arising from recommendations made by the committee, considered by management team and approved by council, sit in respect of measuring performance outcomes;
- to consider where the ongoing development of a more structured performance management regime will benefit the work of the committee;
- to consider the balance in monitoring and measuring implementation of recommendations between the Scrutiny and Audit Committee and parent policy committees; and
- to consider what actions, if any, may be appropriate to pursue.

The detailed brief for the committee's investigation is attached as Appendix A.

The Scrutiny and Audit Committee members who were involved in this investigation were Councillors Peter Bellarby (Chair), Amanda Allan (Vice-Chair), Nan Cullinane, Sandy Duncan, Tom Fleming, Ian Gray, Fergus Hood, Michael Sullivan and Robert Thomas.

It has been agreed that the Scrutiny and Audit Committee should appoint independent external experts to assist with its investigations where appropriate. For this investigation, Dr. Andrew Coulson, of INLOGOV at the University of Birmingham, was appointed. His role encompassed that of both witness and expert. Dr. Coulson is an acknowledged national authority on the operation of scrutiny and overview committees, and previously assisted the Committee in its investigation of Governance and Accountability in Partnership and Joint Working in 2006, (Investigation No. 9).

2 HOW THE INVESTIGATION WAS PROGRESSED

The committee undertook witness evidence sessions, a workshop presentation and considered background papers to enable it to carry out this investigation.

2.1 Documentation

A range of background documentation was provided to the committee at the commencement of the investigation. This included information from both within and outwith Aberdeenshire Council:

- 6 monthly reports to Scrutiny & Audit Committee reviewing work of the committee (samples from June, 2007 and February, 2009);

- Report to Scrutiny & Audit Committee - Monitoring and Evaluating the Impact of Investigations (November, 2008);
- Reports and Extract Minutes of Council and other Committees approving action plans arising from Scrutiny and Audit Committee recommendations;
- Single Outcome Agreement;
- Results Accountability – The Model;
- Tracking and Monitoring of Scrutiny Recommendations – INLOGOV;
- Performance Management, Measurement and Information – Members’ roles in performance management – report of an online conference, March, 2005. (Improvement and Development Agency and Audit Commission); and
- Extracts of the Centre for Public Scrutiny discussion forum on assessing effectiveness of scrutiny and overview.

2.2 Witnesses and evidence gathering

Members of the committee met with a small, specialised selection of Aberdeenshire Council officers involved in delivering services requiring some degree of assessment of value and evaluation of output: these were the Chief Internal Auditor, Mr. David Hughes, and the Corporate Improvement Manager, Mr. Alan Vogan. The committee sought their views on whether there were established systems elsewhere, or generally accepted, which could be applied to assess the effective implementation of recommendations of Scrutiny and Audit Committee investigations. From Dr. Andrew Coulson of INLOGOV at the University of Birmingham, responsible for delivering national training for officers and councillors alike on the subject of scrutiny and overview, the committee heard further about practices elsewhere in assessing and reporting effectiveness of scrutiny investigations.

Full details of the evidence given to the committee by witnesses are contained in the agenda papers for the Scrutiny and Audit Committee meeting of 3 September, 2009. These are located on the Council’s webpage and Arcadia intranet system. These are public documents and can be made available, in hard copy, on request.

3. SHOULD THE INVESTIGATION WORK OF THE COMMITTEE BE SUBJECT TO EVALUATION?

- 3.1 In discussion, it was easily agreed that the work of the committee, like all aspects of the council’s operation, should be open to self-assessment and challenge. This would include determining the added value provided to the council and the communities of Aberdeenshire by having such a mechanism. In doing this, the committee look to the practices and procedures of other local authorities and seek possible areas of improvement. Aberdeenshire’s chosen route of scrutiny and audit, and in particular its adoption of the undertaking of investigation into specific areas of concern, is significantly different from systems which apply elsewhere in Scotland.
- 3.2 That said, when areas for improvement have been identified, the committee rarely makes operationally specific recommendations. It is acknowledged that

although afforded the opportunity to look at issues in close detail, any Scrutiny and Audit Committee investigation is a snapshot in time. All recommendations need to be tempered by a professional assessment of what could be done. When the management team present council with a proposed action plan to deliver the recommendations made by the Scrutiny and Audit Committee, the broadly voiced aims for improvement are translated into SMART actions. In terms of the previous 18 investigations which have been submitted to council, the vast majority of proposals made by the Scrutiny and Audit Committee have been accepted – this blurs ownership, as from that stage on, in real terms the resource allocation and path to implementation do not lie with Scrutiny and Audit Committee but with the parent policy committee.

- 3.3 The Scrutiny and Audit Committee's operations should not be assessed in purely in the context of any tangible savings as a result of the changes made. Some of the recommendations may actually add to the delivery costs of the service – but value may be assessed in terms of meeting public expectations, promoting change, or even in providing assurance that services were being delivered to the best level possible, requiring no specific remedial works. This can be seen clearly in one of the earliest investigations undertaken, into Roads Maintenance, (Investigation No. 2, April, 2003.) This made no shire-specific recommendations, beyond endorsing work already in place and planned, suggesting more be done to keep the public informed and advised of road maintenance issues, but mainly endorsed the need to lobby national government to increase funding to the address the deteriorating infrastructure.
- 3.4 There may be greater need for the assessment of the committee's successes or otherwise in a less complicated manner. This would merely consider whether the investigations have made a difference or changed anything, without seeking to "bean count" or identify the specific changes which have been made. It should also be noted that even a small move in direction may have benefits greatly in excess of any "countable" improvements.
- 3.4 Without control over the resources to enforce the applications of its original recommendations, divorced from the operational translation of the management team's complementary input, it would be unfair to assess the committee's effectiveness in terms of the purely measurable. It should also be noted that the remit for the committee has been very carefully crafted to maintain the autonomy of the policy committees in service delivery – the Scrutiny and Audit Committee role should be to have oversight of the operation of the other committees, not to usurp their role.

4. GOOD PRACTICE IN EVALUATION FROM ELSEWHERE

- 4.1 Since the formal committee meeting on 4 September 2008, where research was reported to on how other authorities measure, if they measure, the implementation of agreed recommendations, discussions have been held with other local authorities, and guidance sought from the Centre for Public Scrutiny and INLOGOV, at the University of Birmingham, as to existing good practice which could be considered for use in Aberdeenshire. Most authorities use a

method of reporting updates and implementation similar to that currently operated in Aberdeenshire, with no one council showing a consistent approach to measuring what the “implemented” means in terms of success. To date, there appears to be no single best practice, as all authorities struggle to measure meaningfully in all areas of investigation.

- 4.2 The Committee heard from Dr. Andrew Coulson of his 25 years as a lecturer at the Institute for Local Government (INLOGOV). Prior to this, he had served 14 years as a Councillor, whilst working part-time. He had also worked as a council economic development officer. His particular academic interest was in scrutiny and the University of Birmingham ran a number of different programmes on the subject, both in onsite, and delivered directly to individual councils, or groups of councils. This was an area of increasing interest and the University had recently started a five day assessed course on scrutiny, for both Councillors and officers, which could be part of a post graduate degree.
- 4.3 Dr. Coulson gave a presentation of the evolution of the scrutiny function in England since initial pilots in 1999, and the enactment of the English Local Government Act, effective from 2001. He explained that whilst there had been some real achievements, there was also a great deal of uncertainty for those operating a scrutiny role. Councillors found it hard not to be taking decisions and not all found it easy to see the difference a scrutiny and overview function could make. The successes depended, in his opinion, on four main factors: good chairing, good officer support, manageable agendas with a small number of investigations conducted in depth and an organisational culture which accepted and understood the scrutiny role.
- 4.4 While the requirement to have a scrutiny and overview function was a statutory obligation in England, different operational approaches had been applied. Dr. Coulson indicated that most English authorities had more than one committee, or divided the work amongst sub-committees. Bigger councils would generally have more than four: Birmingham was the largest with 9. The size of the scrutiny group also varied, most commonly being eight or nine members, with good practice spreading the Chair around the various political parties. Political proportionality was generally reflected in the committee’s make up, although this was not stipulated in the legislation. Dr. Coulson believed that it was much better if the Committee worked as one: “if people in the minority join with the critics in the majority, they can push the limits further.” The scrutiny function could not be a-political, as it was composed of political beings, but Dr. Coulson suggested it was not political in the normal sense.
- 4.5 Dr. Coulson challenged the committee by asking whether the right number of investigations were being undertaken. He suggested that more could be done within a sub-committee structure with investigations running in parallel, or by a single committee making reviews shorter. He voiced concern that to undertake too limited an agenda would turn the committee into a shadow policy committee and make it difficult to bring things to a conclusion. By the same measure, it was thought that if too many investigations were pursued, this might make the reviews overly superficial and of limited value. He suggested that the pre-investigation reports requested on topics which were not initially determined for

investigation could be validly included in assessing the workload of the Committee. Topics should be chosen not only for their inherent interest, but because they were of strategic importance.

- 4.6 Dr. Coulson reported that in England, within a cabinet or executive system of council structure, about 80% of all scrutiny recommendations were accepted. This may relate to the terms in which they were couched and the diplomacy which underlay the scrutiny process, as he suggested that easy recommendations would be easily accepted. An experienced committee, working well, would not make unrealistic recommendations. He suggested that recommendations should be in a form that were not agreed in principle, but should be more specific about something happening – and ideally, with a timescale for implementation. Sometimes implementation took longer than was expected, but in England about 70% of recommendations made were implemented within a year of the investigation report having been accepted.
- 4.7 A key, and perhaps more valid, assessment of outcomes, in Dr. Coulson's opinion, was to look at what changes scrutiny had brought about that would not have happened anyway. This was again a hard thing to measure, especially where scrutiny committees were non-decision-making. In reality, lots of people would play a part in making a change, and it may be that scrutiny would speed up what was going to happen anyway. Decisions in council often matured over a period of time and in the process a lot of the detail was ironed out – this made it very difficult to isolate the specific input of scrutiny.
- 4.8 Dr. Coulson believed that a quick and cheap evaluation could be provided, on a case by case basis, in the form of an annual report. This was used elsewhere and would, as standard, include a page or so on what had been done in the year, and an update on the work of the previous year. The annual report should be formally presented for the consideration of the full council and become the focus for debate. It may also be that another way of evaluating the impact of Scrutiny and Audit Committee would be in this way, with its work submitted for formal consideration by a forum of peers.
- 4.9 Dr. Coulson was challenged to describe how value could be sold to other members when the outcome was not about change. He indicated that explaining the situation would bring its own value – whilst most topics selected for investigation should engender some change, if it were an issue perceived by the public as a concern, then the merit was in the investigation itself if its outcome dismissed this perception as false.
- 4.10 Dr. Coulson suggested that best practice would involve a good number of scrutiny investigations – not too many, not too few – including some with quick wins. These would be reported back to the scrutiny committee every 6 months, or at least every year, in scrutiny reports on what has happened to the recommendations. Individual scrutiny reports should be appropriately launched – with a media strategy and, if possible, a debate in full council – to gain as much credit as possible. An Annual Scrutiny report should be produced and debated in full council.

- 4.11 Dr. Coulson stressed that there should be no confusion between the roles of scrutiny and other policy committees. “It cannot cover everything; it cannot report on everything – nor is it staffed to do so.” Scrutiny was not inspection – only a few places could be visited; it was not regulation; and was not opposition. The English legislation, Dr. Coulson emphasised, made a theoretical distinction between policy review and development and the scrutiny role of holding to account. In reality, this may not be helpful as the two aspects were seldom completely separate. On the ground, there were few restrictions on what scrutiny could do, as Dr. Coulson believed that its potential powers and methods of working were very wide.
- 4.12 Looking to the future, and in the context of the ever-expanding role of Scottish community planning as the co-signatory, with national government, of the Single Outcome Agreement, (SOA,) Dr. Coulson thought that there may be a need to extend the scrutiny to partnership functions. Even if this could only be achieved on the basis of a voluntary agreement with the outside bodies, it would provide, he suggested, an interesting interface between the council and its partners. He believed this was a sensible way for scrutiny to develop and would parallel the current situation in England.

5. WHO OWNS – AND SHOULD MONITOR – THE RECOMMENDATIONS?

- 5.1 While the committee strives, as part of its choice of matters to investigate, not to duplicate work going on in other parts of the council, external inspections or other national events, some of its recommendations ultimately end up being applied in tandem with other initiatives. For example, the outcome of the schools’ catering investigation coincided with the national “Hungry for Success” initiative. This illustrates another issue considered in debate by the committee – where there is an overlap of recommendations, how can it be determined that any improvement can be directly and solely due to the committee’s investigation?
- 5.2 Similarly, the climate change recommendations which came out of “The Bigger Issue”, (Investigation 13,) have become almost inextricably entangled with work associated with the Carbon Footprint project, and the council’s subscription to the national Climate Change initiative. Some of the investigation recommendations also sought to build on existing initiatives as reported to the committee by witnesses – how should an assessment be made of whether these works, pre-dating the committee’s formal report, would have continued and extended even if the investigation had not taken place? This would be even more the case where the outcome of an investigation required new policy to be formulated and agreed before any operational improvements could be progressed. The time taken to have such measures in place could allow for additional, external factors to influence the success of implementation.
- 5.3 Few of the Scrutiny and Audit Committee original reports make more than ten recommendations – some, like Investigation No. 13 into climate change, cited only two high-level, strategic objectives. These became, in the action plan approved by council, 27 action points, grouped into the categories of 6 strategic

recommendations and 21 “other recommendations”. The scrutiny focus of intent was of change in organisational culture, and as each service found the relevance of the strategic objectives resonate with their own field of operation, the 27 initial action points resolved further to dozens of specific projects. The twice yearly review report to the committee seeks to provide an update on all of these, and also what all four policy committees are doing to implement the climate change agenda – but this duplicates work for the officers, as most were also reported to the service policy committee, the Policy and Resources Committee and the Sustainability Sub-Committee. With no influence on the operational translation of the action plan into projects on the ground, or control over the allocation and prioritisation of resources towards delivery, what useful role does the current Scrutiny and Audit Committee monitoring process bring? It could be argued that without re-investigating the same issue again, and even doing so repeatedly, Scrutiny and Audit Committee can not itself truly ascertain that what was reported as being achieved had, in fact, been accomplished.

- 5.4 Parallels may be drawn with the methods by which the Scrutiny and Audit Committee monitors the policy committees’ implementation of recommendations agreed following an internal audit investigation – receiving a summary of the reports which had been considered by the policy committees, the Scrutiny and Audit Committee paid attention to areas where repeated delays or barriers to implementation were reported by the Chief Internal Auditor. The committee would only seek to act on occasions where it felt that the policy committees were not being sufficiently rigorous in pursuing the matter, or to add its weight to changes instructed by the parent committee. A similar process of default reporting for action in implementation of the agreed recommendations arising from Scrutiny and Audit investigations, may be more appropriate than the current monitoring process, which merely creates a vast report of updates which are hard to digest and track progress.
- 5.5 Dr. Coulson gave some suggestions as to how performance data might be best presented in order to avoid councillors – and senior managers – being overwhelmed by statistics. He proposed that there be some kind of “management by exception” – e.g. smiley faces, or traffic lights. Dr. Coulson believed that it was very hard to get officers to be honest about problems with performance – they may find it much easier to look on the bright side of life. If easy steps to improve an indicator could be taken, officers would do so and report the achievement to committee. Dr. Coulson believed that sometimes little could be done, and instead of officers reporting this readily to committee, a whole range of bad behaviour, (“gaming,”) might creep in.
- 5.6 The committee also heard from Mr. David Hughes, the Chief Internal Auditor, of his perception of what could, and could not, be measured.
- 5.7 Mr. Hughes also drew comparisons between the work undertaken by his function and the investigations of the Scrutiny and Audit Committee. Whilst there had been a lot of discussion of measurement amongst his peers in internal audit, he had not yet been presented with a measure which would be useful to him in assessing the impact of internal audit work. Suggested measures might include cost per productive day; number of reports produced,

or number of recommendations made; but Mr. Hughes felt that all of these could be manipulated. This would demonstrate the “gaming” to which Dr. Coulson had referred. Also, was making fewer recommendations a sign that Internal Audit was less effective, or was it a sign that the function was operating in a well-run Council, with less need for recommendations to be made? The same would apply, Mr. Hughes believed, to any assessment of the investigations of the Scrutiny and Audit Committee. For both areas of investigative work Mr. Hughes suggested there would be cases where there could be no measure of impact. A lot of outputs may have happened anyway, and the committee’s role may be validly assessed as a catalyst for change, rather than directly controlling the outputs.

5.8 The reality of local government structures meant that it could also take a long time to reach the end goal. Mr. Hughes felt it would be even more challenging to attempt to measure impact over a long period of time. He stressed to the committee that he was not opposed to measuring, but stated that the measures adopted had to be meaningful and should not be able to be manipulated. He was not aware of any organisation which had achieved, to his satisfaction, meaningful measurement for this area of operation.

5.9 Mr. Hughes suggested that the sole question of assessment might be “are you an effective committee and do you make recommendations that have a positive effect on the Council?” What mattered, in his opinion, was the impact which Aberdeenshire as a whole had as an organisation. This needed the council to have the ability to look at how effective it was in its operations, with the Scrutiny and Audit Committee part of this process. This should be assessed to consider how effective the council was and how what the committee did changed the thinking in the council. In some instances, there may be an immediate effect with an obvious change of attitude that would enable things to happen; in other cases, there might be softer impacts which were less readily discerned. “Bean counting is really very hard and the impact on colleagues is more important”.

There was an awareness of how intangible, but nevertheless effective, impact on colleagues and cultural change often was.

6. WILL A MORE STRUCTURED PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REGIME BENEFIT THE COMMITTEE’S WORK?

6.1 From consideration of previous reports to the committee, it was reported that for some investigations, the topic may already be expressed in measurable terms. Current topic scoring criteria suggested that items selected for investigation should fall into one of the following categories:

- Poor performing service (evidence from performance indicators (PIs)/benchmarking);
- Service ranked as important by the council’s community (e.g. through market surveys/citizens’ panels);
- High level of user/general public dissatisfaction with service (market surveys/citizens’ panels/complaints);

- High level of budgetary commitment to the service/policy area (as percentage of total expenditure); and
 - Pattern of budgetary overspends/underspends.
- 6.2 The committee had determined that each of the above categories could be a route to improving the measure currently reported through existing measurement and assessment structures, such as PIs and residents surveys. The availability of additional sources of information from the management reports generated by the Council's contact centre was proving increasingly helpful, and it was expected the increasing use of the corporate consultation database, (itself a tangible outcome of Investigation No. 4, Public Consultation, Communication and Engagement, November 2004,) would provide a library on information on customer feedback on ranges of council activities and services. Both of these developing areas may have a higher profile in future annual topic scoring considerations.
- 6.3 However, in terms of the validity of the figures reported either from complaints, as collated from the contact centre, or from the annual residents survey, the committee consider that caution must be applied. Consideration needed to be given as to how representative any sample was. Were the same questions being answered by the same people year on year? How objective could these subjective assessments by individuals be? How consistent were the responses of even the same individual in repeat surveys? Did a series of complaints from the same individual on a sequence of occasions count more, or less highly, as the same complaint from a series of sources on the same occasion? How were the opinions of those members of the public who do not participate in surveys, or phone to complain and comment, incorporated? Also, the role of the democratically elected member as a voice for their communities should not be underrated in an evaluation of representativeness, but does not easily translate into a measure on which to contrast improvement.
- 6.4 In addition, figures reported in any survey can not be accepted on face value. In the context of the previous discussion of the equity of sports and leisure facility provision, (Investigation No. 16, October, 2008,) some of the committee recalled hearing from Mr. Eddy Graham of IPB of the degree of assurance which could be assumed from surveys of particular size, with targeted customers on specific issues.
- 6.5 The committee heard from Mr. Alan Vogan, Corporate Improvement Manager, that the proposed new system of performance management would make it much easier to relate any individual outcome or action by the council to specific inputs and output tracking. This system would not only locate each staff role and remit within the canopy of the Single Outcome Agreement, strategic priorities, or service plans, but would track resources required to deliver. It would also allow resources to be allocated to deliver those actions deemed to be a priority. The recent work of the Finance service in assisting the development of policy led budgeting, (itself subject to previous investigation by the committee, Investigation No. 17, June, 2009,) would further cross-reference this work, generating correlations which would allow all activity to be tracked and alterations measured. This would afford the Scrutiny and Audit Committee,

in considering the application of any of its recommendations, an available baseline of the current situation at the start of the process. This could be used to contrast and demonstrate any improvements at various stages of implementation. This information would benefit by not being generated specifically to inform Scrutiny and Audit Committee but by being created as standard performance monitoring.

- 6.6 It was felt that more could be done to link the committee's recommendations with themes in both the strategic priorities and Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) – in this way the impact of input would be more easily discerned in areas of directional change as opposed to physical manifestations.
- 6.7 The debate surrounding Performance Indicators (PIs) was already familiar to Members, with some claims historically that the measurements only reflect that certain percentage of the Council's works which could be evaluated this way, not all areas of work. For other services, which may be better assessed in terms of quality not quantity, it had been suggested that a matrix assessment may require to be established. For example, the council seeks to be the "best council, providing excellent services for all" – but without infinite resources, choices of best value and an assessment of competing priorities may curtail the options available. Services may be "the best they *can* be", not "the best". The committee spent time in discussing how these types of determination might best be distinguished in terms of measuring success of implementation in areas of cultural change.
- 6.8 An additional consideration raised in debate of the issues was that the committee may choose, in its writing up of conclusions, to specifically voice its outcomes in terms known to be measurable. For example, a recommendation of Investigation No. 14, into the Management of Public Toilets, (April 2007,) might have been that "by the end of 2010, each community in Aberdeenshire with a population of over 3000 should have three publicly available toilets", with a definition of "publicly available" having been agreed. This would make the monitoring a simple counting procedure – the current total, compared to what we had before the investigation's outcomes were agreed. Such an approach may again only default to counting what could be counted and not necessarily assessing successful implementation. It also could not be said to assess the improvement to service which those additional facilities may be assumed to provide. Taking the example from the same investigation of the specialist "changing places" style disabled toilet, with its hoists and a table to allow the changing of severely disabled by their carers, the target group of potential users is small – very few may specifically require the facilities, so there may not be a huge increase in usage, or customer feedback. In this instance, what may be assessed as important was the provision of the facilities at all, not the number of users.

7. HOW CAN BALANCE IN MONITORING AND MEASURING IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS BETWEEN THE SCRUTINY AND AUDIT COMMITTEE AND THE PARENT POLICY COMMITTEES BE ACHIEVED?

- 7.1 Dr. Coulson provided the committee with some thoughts on the potential relationships between the scrutiny function and the policy committees. “There is nothing to be gained from a scrutiny committee going over again the same material that the policy committee discussed earlier. If scrutiny is to have a constructive on-going role, it has to be because the policy committee wants this.”
- 7.2 From the discussions with the management team, and consideration of previous reports on implementation which had been submitted to the Scrutiny and Audit Committee, the committee was aware that the current system of monitoring does not achieve what could have been possible, had the matter under review been within the direct ownership of the Scrutiny and Audit Committee. It was felt that there was a high degree of duplicate reporting which did not add value to the operation of the council and may divert staff resources from a more useful application.
- 7.3 A default, by exception, summary report may be part of the solution – with more detailed reports only requested in instances where the Scrutiny and Audit Committee believed that some remedial action was required, or intervention necessary to address delays in implementation. Such a process would be supported by the greater use of information bulletins to copy, as a matter of course, reports going to the specific policy committees to the Scrutiny and Audit Committee. This should be generated by the service itself and not rely on being sourced by the officers supporting the Scrutiny and Audit Committee.
- 7.4 It may also be that regular meetings between the members of the policy committees, or at least their chair and vice chair, and members of the Scrutiny and Audit Committee could be investigated as a means of exchanging information. This suggestion was made by Dr. Coulson as a method which would clarify the respective roles and avoid any blurring of the remits.

8. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 From the evidence heard, the papers considered and discussion of the issues involved, there were several clear areas which came to the attention of the Scrutiny and Audit Committee.
- 8.2 There was an on-going concern about pressure on staff time and resources of the current review and monitoring processes. It was felt this did not add value to either work of the committee or the council as a whole. It was suggested that there may be a better way than the current monitoring processes. The suggestion that the current operating procedures was not resource effective, and meant that officers would often have to report to two different committees, appeared to provided a counter-point to the position previously voiced that the Scrutiny and Audit Committee should develop mechanisms for being assured, and able to demonstrate in some evidence based way, that the agreed recommendations were being taken forward, and successfully applied to make a difference.
- 8.3 There is an issue about ownership and control of the recommendations approved by council. Members received, at formal committee, a report by the Chief Internal Auditor on an area arising from a previous Scrutiny and Audit Committee investigation. This demonstrated not conformity but a degree of confusion, despite the committee having being assured that a new policy had not only been created but was being implemented. Without having direct ownership of the application of the council-agreed recommendations, and an operational awareness amplified by both professional officer support and the experience which is gained by councillors on the parent policy committees into their areas of operation, the Scrutiny and Audit Committee has no option but to accept the responses submitted by officers as part of its twice yearly review of previous investigations. The only alternative to accepting what is reported by officers would be re-investigation. The difficulty with that would be that the outcome would not necessarily mirror that of the original investigation, acknowledged to be a snapshot in time.
- 8.4 The committee has always been aware that whilst it can take the opportunity to consider specific matters in detail, it does not have either the technical awareness of professional officers of the Council on specific topics, nor does it benefit from being informed by experience at a strategic level on the topic, unlike those members who sit on the service orientated policy committees. Any recommendations arising from a Scrutiny and Audit Committee investigation are therefore channelled through management team to council which approves an action plan, passed to the appropriate parent committee to enact. Recommendations, as they form part of the original investigation report, tend to be suggestions of potential direction of travel and not specifically assessed operational changes – the committee acknowledges that to do more would be generally inappropriate.
- 8.5 Most of the recommendations made in the 18 investigations to date are therefore less specific and more indicative of required direction of travel, relying

on the operational experience of others to translate into SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timed) objectives. The Scrutiny and Audit Committee must rely on others to apply and progress the amended version of their own recommendations. It could be argued that the ownership of the recommendations changes as soon as the investigation report is considered by council in the context of the management team proposed action plan. In Aberdeenshire's case, very few of the recommendations made by the Scrutiny and Audit Committee have not been accepted by council and this may cloud the perception of ownership.

- 8.6 Debate focused on when the Scrutiny and Audit Committee should retain ownership of monitoring of the implementation of recommendations, or when the monitoring should be handed over to parent policy committees and only reported to the Scrutiny and Audit Committee in the event that delay or incomplete application was experienced. If this procedure were to be adopted, this would mirror, to a great extent, the dual reporting of matters by the Chief Internal Auditor to both policy and Scrutiny and Audit Committees. This process would allow staff resources to be more efficiently directed, but would require that a support method of ensuring that all relevant information was provided to the Scrutiny and Audit Committee.
- 8.7 In choosing topics for consideration, the committee makes every effort to use accepted sources of customer feedback, and external and internal reviews, to focus attention on matters which may benefit from greater exploration or are causing concern. In very few cases is the choice of topic solely related to a single factor, such as drop in Performance Indicators (PIs), or increasing public concern, which can be relayed in a hard figure. If this were the case, it would be far easier to ascertain a baseline which may be taken to represent the starting point for assessment. To have a baseline would make it easier to assess the achievement, or not, of the desired outcome. For example, it might be that public feedback from a residents survey might be that each community in Aberdeenshire should have its own swimming pool. A baseline could be easily calculated of the number of pools, and a simple calculation could compare this to the number to be sought. Some Scrutiny and Audit Committee recommendations were simple numerical propositions – Investigation No. 14, into the management of public toilets, noted that there were no specialised facilities capable of being used by severely disabled people and their carers, requiring a height adjustable table, a hoist and extra floor-space. From this zero base, the committee recommended that three be installed – one in north, south and central Aberdeenshire. From zero to three will be a clearly demonstrable fulfilment of a specific recommendation.
- 8.8 In other cases, the recommended improvement is for the establishment of a new policy, or other cultural change to the organisation, which may take time to fully bed down. This leads to a need to moderate the original intentions by reassessing them during the course of implementation. The work relating to the changes in personnel policy on recruitment, (Investigation No.8, 2005,) is a good example of this. Whilst the majority of the recommendations have been applied, some originally voiced have been set aside by the Scrutiny and Audit Committee as no longer appropriate to apply. The committee is very aware

that each investigation is a snapshot in time, and what may have seemed appropriate at the time of the investigation should not be slavishly applied without being related to current needs and experiences. In a similar way, some of the originally approved investigations outcomes become redundant in response to changes in circumstances which could not have been foreseen at the time of the original investigation. For example, the recommendation arising from Investigation No. 10, on Decentralisation of Decision-making in Aberdeenshire, that each officer whose role included participation in one, or more, of the Area Management Teams should have this role highlighted in their job description, was overtaken by the application of the Single Status agreement. As there were a huge range of officers at varying levels within the different services providing support to the area function in this way, the remit could not be evaluated as standard for each post.

- 8.9 The situation is further complicated by the fact the investigations do not take place in a vacuum. The investigation in 2003/04 into School Catering, (Investigation No. 3,) appears very successful – the access to healthier food options in Aberdeenshire’s schools has grown significantly, with a corresponding reduction in availability in less healthy choices. This may be deemed to be a success – but is the improvement entirely due to the Scrutiny and Audit Committee recommendations? How much influence did the publicity of a certain TV chef’s campaign to improve school meals, or the national government’s “Hungry for Success” initiative have? This should not diminish the fact that, as a result of the Scrutiny and Audit Committee work, things did change and a clear impact can be determined.
- 8.10 Investigation No.3 also demonstrates a further complication, on how intentions are voiced as recommendations. If the intent behind having more healthy options were to have a more healthy school population, this has not yet been demonstrated. The uptake in school-provided healthy meals has decreased, especially in secondary schools where access to alternative options may be unrestricted, without forcing pupils to eat at the school at lunchtime. It should also be noted that cultural changes in eating habits can not be switched overnight, and require the amended options to be in place to deliver a climate in which the wished for choice options may be undertaken. The committee was reminded that a second part of the original choice of this topic was to address revenue issues for the service, and various actions have been, and continue to be, taken to position the service to best meet its current and future challenges.
- 8.11 It was considered that the work being undertaken to move Aberdeenshire’s performance reporting culture to one where performance is more closely managed within each section, with each employee having a clearly defined role which relates to one of the council’s aims and objectives will be beneficial. Whether voiced in the Single Outcome Agreement, the strategic priorities or the individual service plans which underpin them, this linkage may provide greater statistical information to generate a known baseline for more of the council’s various activities. If that were the case, in addition to allowing the construction and standard reporting of meaningful performance indicators at all levels of operation, the application of any Scrutiny and Audit Committee sourced recommendation could be more easily demonstrated.

- 8.12 The committee feels that there is no merit in seeking to measure every outcome from each recommendation in all reports – the ownership and ability to alter outcomes does not lie with it. It is also essential that there be a clear degree of separation between its spheres of influence and the work of the policy committees. There is, however, merit in reconsidering how the Scrutiny and Audit Committee should seek to be updated on previous investigations, especially when the recommendations have mushroomed from high level strategic aims, to multiple specific action points, or policies, beneath which individual projects may be monitored. This is clearly demonstrated in Investigation No. 13 into climate change, where two headline recommendations became 27 “strategic” and “other” recommendations when approved by council, and in turn have become hundred of applications, pursued by each of the services and reported to the parent policy committees. It becomes harder to justify duplicate reporting, especially outwith the initial year of a report having been accepted by council.
- 8.13 In the processes of this investigation, and in particular when looking at other authorities, especially those in England, to determine good practice in evaluation, it became clear that there was no single acceptable standard method which could be applied. The committee had initially considered that measurement should be undertaken – and had believed that this would be both valid and easy. It learned that some councils merely count the number of recommendations accepted; others count the number implemented across time – but this would need a prioritisation of recommendations and an element of weighting to be added to the investigation report. For example, if 10 recommendations were made, is the task 10% complete by the completion of a single item? Or should the most important outcome be given additional weight – and if so, should this be standard? Should the resources be prioritised to deliver the recommendations in an assumed priority order? This also would require be reconciled to the fact that Scrutiny and Audit Committee do not control the resources to make things happen.
- 8.14 The evidence provided by the Chief Internal Auditor was of great assistance to the committee. He explained that for every potential definition or measurement suggested, a counter argument could be made – no single measure could be agreed, as all possible applications could be subject to manipulation. The committee is similarly clear that there is no single valid measurement of effectiveness which can be used to determine the undoubted impact its work has had on Aberdeenshire Council’s operation. Having looked at the outcomes reported of implementation of the 18 investigations to date, the committee feel that in each case a demonstrable change has happened as a result of the Scrutiny and Audit Committee work. It is not always possible to claim entire credit for any changes or to assess them statistically – but things have changed.
- 8.15 It is felt that the most accurate assessment of the work of the committee may be perceived in its impact on other members of the council. On that basis, it is proposed that more attention be dedicated to having the committee’s work formally considered by council, and that this could be achieved by the adoption

of a system of annual reporting of what had been done, providing updates on previous investigations and scoping the proposed future work plan.

- 8.16 The committee, having considered the witness evidence provided to it and having reconsidered, in depth, previous debates on issues of measurement and evaluation, is clear on several aspects of operation which it would wish to recommend to the Council.

It is not possible, nor would it be worthwhile, to provide the stereotypical measured assessment of improvements made as a result of Scrutiny and Audit Committee investigations. The base information may not be there; the improvement may be more one of cultural or organisational change which can only be considered subjectively, and investigations may not always generate any need for change.

Having said that, it may be that for some specific investigation recommendations, an outcome can be voiced in a more measurable way. The committee will aim to be more aware of this in how it chooses to express its recommendations. To seek to express all its recommendations in a measurable form may lead to the choice of aims specifically for their being able to be charted in this way, and not because they are believed to resolve the problem.

- **The committee will be more aware, in voicing its recommendations, of aspects relating to activities supporting the delivery of the Single Outcome Agreement and strategic priorities, which can be more easily voiced and measured to track future progress.**

Also, it should be the case that in the future, with the proposed improvements to performance management framework, that a known baseline may be established for at least some of the recommended outcomes. If this were so, the Scrutiny and Audit Committee's proposals may more easily include more specific and measurable outcomes. Additional information accrued through the Contact Centre and from the consultation database, established and maintained by Corporate Communications, will also facilitate this.

- **The committee will, in its choice of future topics and assessment of potential areas of improvement, become more aware of baseline information available to it which may help express outcomes in a more measurable way.**

The role of Scrutiny and Audit Committee should not duplicate the role and responsibilities of the parent policy committees – theirs is the true remit to monitor and pursue implementation of the council-agreed action plan arising from any Scrutiny and Audit Committee investigation. As soon as the Scrutiny and Audit Committee investigation report is complemented, in its submission to council, by the management team response, the recommendations are no longer in the control of Scrutiny and Audit Committee. There should be an obligation on the policy committees to ensure that any updates they are given are also provided to the Scrutiny and Audit Committee, not as a duplication of item for formal committee

consideration, but initially as a bulletin item. Barriers to implementation should also be reported in this way.

- **Update reports to the parent policy committees on matters arising from a Scrutiny and Audit Committee investigation should be automatically copied to the Scrutiny and Audit Committee as a bulletin report for its information. If there are barriers to the implementation of any of the recommendations, within the agreed timescale, these should be referred back to the Scrutiny and Audit Committee as well as to the parent policy committee.**

Also, in order to more clearly delineate the relationship between the Scrutiny and Audit Committee's overview function and the remit of the policy committees, there should be a discussion by all interested parties of the possible value of implementing the suggestion from Dr. Coulson, of the potential for occasional meetings between the Chair and Vice-Chair of the policy committee, and the Scrutiny and Audit Committee, to discuss progress on actions arising from Scrutiny and Audit related or generated recommendations.

- **A discussion should be held on the possible value of the potential for, or added value of, occasional meetings between the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of each policy committee and the Scrutiny and Audit Committee as a forum for closer working and mutual awareness of the role of each.**

The committee feels that the regular six monthly review of previous investigation report should be amended to be more accessible. This could be done potentially through a summary table of all investigations, and seeking to chart progress towards total compliance and implementation either by the use of smiley faces, or some other assessment of incremental progress. This should be designed to ensure that it can not be assumed that each completed recommendation is of equal priority and weight – over time the “quick wins”, which may be relatively cheap to effect and can be done in short time, will be replaced by residual actions where implementation is delayed because it is not easy or straight forward. The more complex and costly items may take longer to implement and this should be expected. Officers should consider how best this may be done, and it may be based on the outline contained in Appendix C hereto.

- **Revisions be made to the standard six monthly reporting format for previous investigations, including the application of a summary table of the overall status of all investigations, and methods of charting compliance explored to make the document of greater use.**

The presentation of those matters which belong purely to the Scrutiny and Audit Committee should be made clear. In addition to the regular six monthly update reports, amended as suggested above, it is recommended that Scrutiny and Audit Committee produce an annual report which provides information on work undertaken that year, updates on previous investigations and gives an indication of the proposed future work plan. This report would include topics which had been subject of report to the committee as well as those chosen for formal investigation. It should be formally presented to council and debated there. This would allow for a public

consideration of the work of the committee and an assessment of its impacts on council operations by other elected members.

- **The Scrutiny and Audit Committee should produce an annual report for formal submission to, and consideration by, Aberdeenshire Council.**

In addition, more opportunities should be explored to provide the public and staff of Aberdeenshire with additional exposure to the work of the committee. In this regard, press launches should be maximised and the council's webpage and Arcadia, (intranet system,) used to channel regular updates of developments in the committee's work plan.

- **Greater use should be made of the corporate communication facilities to raise awareness, both internally and externally, of the committee and its work.**

A final area for consideration in the future development of the scrutiny function in Aberdeenshire is the proposal voiced by Dr. Coulson that there may be options, or indeed the need, to extend scrutiny to joint ventures in which the Council is merely one of many partners. This would parallel the statutory position in England. As an increasing volume of council funds and activity is directed through Community Planning Partnership initiatives, this may be an area of growing public concern. Any cross-organisational investigation could only be undertaken by mutual agreement, would need to resonate with the aims and objectives of all relevant partners and require very clearly defined terms of reference. This would be a matter for future consideration rather than immediate application.

- **The Community Planning Board be alerted to the mandatory scrutiny arrangements in England for their future consideration in areas of joint working which seek to progress the agreed Single Outcome Agreement.**

9. THANKS AND INVITATION FOR FEEDBACK

- 9.1 The Scrutiny and Audit Committee would like to record its appreciation of the co-operation and assistance it received from internal and external witnesses: - Dr. Andrew Coulson; Mr. David Hughes and Mr. Alan Vogan.
- 9.2 Each investigation that is undertaken is part of a learning experience for the Committee and it would welcome any feedback or comments from participants or interested individuals on the investigation process and this report.

**Cllr. Peter Bellarby
Chair
Scrutiny and Audit
Committee**

**Cllr. Amanda Allan
Vice-Chair
Scrutiny and Audit Committee**

Subject to be reviewed – Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Scrutiny and Audit Committee Investigations.	Investigation No.	19
Purpose and objectives of investigation		
<p>1). To consider the recommendation from Audit Scotland that the investigative work of the Committee should be subject to evaluation;</p> <p>2) to consider good practice in evaluation from elsewhere;</p> <p>3) to determine where ownership of actions arising from recommendations made by the committee, considered by Management Team and approved by full Council, sit in respect of measuring performance outcomes;</p> <p>4) to consider where the ongoing development of a more structured performance management regime will benefit the work of the committee;</p> <p>5) to consider the balance in monitoring and measuring implementation of recommendations between the Scrutiny and Audit Committee and parent policy committees; and</p> <p>6) to consider what actions, if any, may be appropriate to pursue.</p>		
Background papers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 monthly reports to Scrutiny & Audit Committee reviewing work of the Committee (June, 2007 and February, 2009); • Report to Scrutiny & Audit Committee - Monitoring and Evaluating the Impact of Investigations (November, 2008); • Reports and Extract Minutes of Council and other Committees approving action plans arising from Scrutiny & Audit Committee recommendations; • Report to Scrutiny & Audit Committee, Internal Audit (November, 2009); • Single Outcome Agreement; • Results Accountability – The Model; • Tracking and Monitoring of Scrutiny Recommendations – INLOGOV; and • Performance Management, Measurement and Information – Members’ roles in performance management – report of an online conference, March, 2005. (Improvement and Development Agency and Audit Commission). 	
Witnesses to be invited to provide evidence	<p>External – Dr. Andrew Coulson, Senior Lecturer in Local Government, INLOGOV, (Uni. of Birmingham).</p> <p>Chief Officers – David Hughes, Chief Internal Auditor; and Alan Vogan, Corporate Improvement Manager.</p>	
Site Visits	n/a	
Consultation process	n/a.	
Project Team (officers)	Jan McRobbie and Alison Cumming, Law and Administration.	
External expert	Dr Andrew Coulson, University of Birmingham	
Investigation Timetable	May, 2009.	

APPENDIX B – GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS USED

INLOGOV	Institute of Local Government Studies, University of Birmingham
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timed
SOA	Single Outcome Agreement
PIs	Performance Indicators

**APPENDIX C
POTENTIAL ISSUES TO BE CONSIDERED IN AMENDMENT OF CURRENT 6
MONTHLY REVIEW UPDATE REPORT**

Scrutiny & Audit want to be able to measure the effectiveness/ impact of their recommendations.

Review of current process (albeit brief):

- All reports set out recommendations, management team response, proposed actions, responsible officer and deadline.
- Progress of actions reviewed six monthly.
- Review of recommendations annual.

Observations:

- Recommendations do not always (if at all) set out the outcome(s) to be achieved.
- Recommendations do not set out appropriate measurement / evaluation methods.
- Review process / timetable standardised, this may or may not be appropriate to the recommendation i.e. some may need reviewing more frequently to avoid slippage.
- Completed actions not evaluated.

Recommendations:

- That an enhanced framework for recommendations, monitoring and measuring/evaluating be considered and, if agreed, incorporated into the reporting procedures.
- Progress monitoring to be based on the following format:
 - Not yet started – action(s) not due to begin.
 - Behind schedule – action(s) started but not on time.
 - On schedule – action(s) as planned.
 - Complete – action(s) completed.
- Outcome measurement/evaluation to be based on the following format:
 - 3 = expected outcome achieved
 - 2 = outcome partially achieved + comments
 - 1 = no outcome + comments